

# **Lake Michigan Beach Forecast Season Begins May 21st**

The National Weather Service Chicago Office resumed issuing Recreational Beach forecasts for the shoreline of Lake and Cook Counties in Illinois and Lake and Porter Counties in Indiana for the summer 2015 swim season beginning Thursday afternoon May 21<sup>st</sup> valid Friday May 22<sup>nd</sup>.

## **Returning this Year:**

### ***Beach Hazard Statements***

Beach Hazard Statements will be issued over the summer on days when dangerous swimming conditions are expected. The Beach Hazard Statement addresses various beach hazards and in 2013 replaced the Rip Current Statements that had been issued in past years. The experimental phase for this product ended after summer 2014.

### ***Swim Risk Categories in the Beach Forecast:***

The Beach Forecast will no longer refer to Low, Moderate and High Swim Risk.

**Low:** Dangerous waves and currents are not expected. However, dangerous currents may exist at any time near piers, breakwalls, and river outlets. Always use caution and never swim alone. Waves of 1 to 3 feet or less.

**Moderate:** Breaking waves and currents expected. Stay away from dangerous areas like piers, breakwalls, and river outlets. Always have a flotation device with you in the water. Waves of 2 to 4 feet.

**High:** Life threatening waves and currents expected. Stay out of the water, and stay away from dangerous areas like piers and breakwalls. Waves of 3 to 5 feet or higher.

## **Factors Contributing to Dangerous Swimming Conditions**

### ***High Waves***

High waves pose several dangers to swimmers at Lake Michigan beaches. First, high waves will cause swimmers to become fatigued. Large waves are very powerful and can push a person off a sandbar and into deeper water, requiring them to swim through a rapid succession of waves to get back to more shallow water.

### ***Rip Currents and Structural Currents***

Also, high waves result in dangerous rip currents and structural currents. Rip currents are strong, fast moving channels of water that form rapidly and flow quickly away from shore through breaks or low spots in the sandbar. Structural currents are strong, fast

moving currents which frequently flow along piers, breakwalls and jetties toward deeper water offshore.

### **Criteria for Issuance of Beach Hazard Statements**

NWS Chicago will issue a Beach Hazard Statement when there is a high swim risk forecast for all or some of our shoreline counties.

High waves of at least 3 to 5 feet and dangerous currents.

We do not issue statements for a Moderate Risk, but a Moderate Risk will be highlighted in the Beach forecast.

People heading to Lake Michigan beaches this summer should:

- 1) Check <http://www.weather.gov/chicago> or NOAA Weather Radio to see if any Beach Hazard Statements are in effect, and if they are, plan to stay out of the water that day.
- 2) Check out the swim hazard risk for each lakeshore county graphically at: <http://www.weather.gov/greatlakes/beachhazards#lot>
- 3) Swim on lifeguarded beaches when possible.
- 4) Refer to warning flags at local beaches for the latest information before going into Lake Michigan waters.

**Flag Definitions:**

**Green:** OK to swim; **Yellow:** Caution is urged; **Red:** Hazardous to swim

Swimming at Lake Michigan beaches is a wonderful part of living in or visiting this area, but on days when waves are high and currents are strong, it is a very dangerous activity and one that should be postponed until the hazardous conditions subside. Please stay informed and safe this summer, and enjoy the beaches!

“Like” us on [Facebook!](#)

Follow us on [Twitter!](#)